

THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON
Author of "The Man with the Golden Butterflies"

CHAPTER XVII.

Golden Butterflies.

If you are one of those cagions people who must verify by the calendar every new moon you read of in a book, and if you are pained to discover the historian lifting anchor and spreading sail contrary to the reckonings of the nautical almanac, I beg to call your attention to these items from the time-table of the Mid-Western and Southern Railway for December, 1901: The southbound express passed Annandale at exactly 55 minutes after four p.m. It was scheduled to reach Cincinnati at 11 o'clock sharp. This, I trust, is sufficiently explicit.

To the student of morals and mores I will say a further word. I had resolved to practice deception in running away from Glenarm House to keep my promise to Marian Devereux. By leaving I should forfeit my right to any part of my grandfather's estate; but of more immediate importance was my absence from Glenarm House at this juncture when the attacks of Morgan and the strange wave of Bates made it clearly my duty to remain. Pickering and I were engaged in a sharp contest, and I was beginning to enjoy it to the full, but I did not falter in my determination to visit Cincinnati, hoping to return without my schemes being discovered, so the next afternoon I began preparing for my journey.

"Hans, I fear that I'm taking a severe cold and I'm going to dose myself with whisky and quinine and go to bed. I shan't want any dinner—nothing until you see me again."

I yawned and stretched myself with a groan.

"Very sorry, sir. Shan't I call a doctor?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll sleep it off and be as lively as a cricket in the morning."

At four o'clock I told him to carry some hot water and lemons to my room, bade him an emphatic good-night and locked the door as he left. Then I packed my evening clothes in a suit-case. I threw the bag and heavy sister from a window, swung myself out upon the limb of a big maple and let it beat me to its sharpest then dropped lightly to the ground.

passed the gate and struck off toward the village with a joyful sense of freedom. I reached the station without incident and waited in the freight shed to keep out of sight of the station loafers until my train drew up, then quietly jumped aboard. I took a seat in the Washington car and after supper in the dining car made myself comfortable and I dreamed as the train sped through the dark. The passengers about me went to sleep and I was left sprawled out by open section, lurking on the shadowy frontier between the known world and dreamland.

"We're running into Cincinnati ten minutes late," said the porter's voice, and in a moment I was in the vestibule and out, hurrying to a hotel. At the St. Botolph I ordered a carriage and broke all records changing my clothes. The time-table informed me that the Chicago express left at half-past one. There was no reason why I should not be safe at Glenarm House by my usual breakfast hour in the morning if all went well. To avoid loss of time in returning to the station I paid the hotel charge and carried my bag away with me.

"Doctor Armstrong's residence? Yes, sir, I've already taken two loads there."

The carriage was soon climbing what seemed to be a mountain to the heights above Cincinnati. To this day I associate Ohio's most interesting city with a lonely carriage ride that was as strange to me as a garrulous jungle in the wilds of Africa. And my heart began to perform strange tatuos on my ribs. I was going to the house of a gentleman who did not know of my existence, to see a girl who was his guest, to whom I had never, as the conventions go, been presented. It did not seem half so easy, now that I was well launched upon the adventure.

I stopped the cabman just as he was about to enter an iron gateway whose posts bore two great lamps.

"That's all right, sir. I can drive right in."

"But you needn't," I said, jumping out. "Wait right here."

Doctor Armstrong's residence was brilliantly lighted, and the strains of a waltz stole across the lawn thereto. I made a detour and studied the house, seeking a door by which I could enter without passing the unfriendly Gibson, a host and hostess on guard to welcome belated guests.

A long conservatory filled with tropical plants gave me an opportunity. Promenaders were passing idly through it and out into another part of the house by an exit I could not see. A handsome, spectacled gentleman opened a glass door within a yard of where I stood, sniffed the air and said to his companion as he turned back with a shrug into the conservatory:

"There's no sign of snow. It isn't Christmas weather at all."



At the Top of the Stair, Her Height Accented by Her Gown of White. Stood Marian Devereux.

Then down the steps, between the line of ghosts arrested in their descent, came a dark laughing girl in the garb of Little Red Riding Hood amid general applause and laughter.

"It's Olivia! She was the warden!" exclaimed the spectacled gentleman, and the girl whose dark curlis were sheken about her face, ran up to us and threw her arms about him and kissed him. It was a charming picture—the figures on the stairway, the pretty, graceful child, the eager, happy faces all about. I was too interested in the scene to be uncomfortable.

Then, at the top of the stair, her height accented by her gown of white, stood Marian Devereux, hesitating an instant, as a bird pauses before taking wing, and then laughingly running between the lines to where Olivia faced her in mock affection. To the charm of the girl in the woodland was added now the dignity of beautiful womanhood, and my heart leaped at the thought that I had ever spoken to her, that I was there because she had taunted me with the risk of coming.

Above, on the stair landing, a deep-toned clock began to strike midnight and every one cried "Merry Christmas!" and "Olivia won!" and there was more hand clapping, in which I joined with good will.

Some one behind me was explaining what had just occurred. Olivia, the youngest daughter of the house, had been denied a glimpse of the ball; Miss Devereux had made a wager with her host that Olivia would appear before midnight and Olivia, defeating the plot against her, gained the main ball at the stroke of 12.

"Good night! Good night!" called Olivia—the real Olivia—in derision to the company, and turned and ran back through the applauding, laughing throng.

The spectacled gentleman was Olivia's father, and he mockingly rebuked Marian Devereux for having encouraged an infraction of parental discipline, while she was twitting him upon the loss of his wager. Then her eyes rested upon me for the first time. She lifted her brows slightly, but continued talking placidly to her host. The situation did not please me; I had not traveled so far and bargained for dinner with Doctor Armstrong's house in quest of a girl with blue eyes merely to stand by while she talked with another man.

I drew nearer, impatiently, and was conscious that four other young men in white waistcoats and gloves quite as irreproachable as my own stood ready to claim her the instant she was free. I did not propose to be thwarted by the beauty of Cincinnati and I addressed my host boldly.

"I beg your pardon, Doctor—I said with an assurance for which I blushed to this hour."

"All right, my boy; I, too, have been in Arcady!" he exclaimed in cheerful apology, and she put her hand on my arm and I fled her away.

"He called me 'my boy,' so I must be passing master," I remarked, not daring to look at her.

"He's afraid not to recognize you. His inability to remember faces is a town joke."

We reached a quiet corner of the great hall and I found a seat for her.

"You don't need to mind to me."

me—you knew I would come. I should have come across the world for this—for just this."

Her eyes were grave at once.

"Why did you come? I did not think you were so foolish. This is all I wanted. You didn't know that Mr. Pickering—Mr. Pickering—"

She was greatly distressed and thus name came from her choking.

"Yes, what of it?" I laughed. "He is well on the way to California—and without you?"

"No—you don't know—you don't understand—he's here." He abandoned his California trip at Chicago; he telegraphed me to expect him—here—tonight. You must go at once—at once."

"Ah, but you can't frighten me." I said, trying to realize just what a meeting with Pickering in that house might mean.

"No—" she looked anxiously about, "they were to arrive late, he and the Taylors; they know the Armstrongs quite well. They may come at any moment now. Please go!"

"But I have only a few minutes myself—you wouldn't have me sit them out in the station down town? There are some things I have come to say, and Arthur Pickering and I are not afraid of each other."

"But you must not meet him here. Think what that would mean to me! You are very foolishly, Mr. Glenarm, I had no idea you would come—"

"But you wished to try me—you challenged me."

"That wasn't me—it was Olivia," she laughed, more at ease. "I thought—"

"See what did you think—that I was dead hand and foot by a dead man's memory?"

"No, I wasn't that wretched for time but I enjoyed playing the child before you—I really love Olivia—and I seemed that the fairies were protecting me and that I could play being a child at the very end of the chapter without any real mischief coming to me. I wish I were Olivia," she declared her eyes away from me.

"That's rather idle. I'm not really sure yet what your name is, and I don't care. Let's imagine that we haven't any names—I'm sure my name isn't of any use, and I'll be glad to give names to all my dars if only—"

"If only—" she repeated, smiling and closing her fan. It was a frail blue tribe, painted in golden butterlies.

"There are so many difficulties that I hesitate to choose, but I will venture one. If only you will come back to St. Agatha's!—Not tomorrow, or the next day, but, say, with the first bluebirds I believe they are the harbingers up there."

Her very ease was a balm to my spirits; she was now a restful daughter of repose. One arm in its long white sleeve lay quiet in her lap; her right hand held the golden butterflies against the soft curve of her cheek. A collar of pearls clasped her throat and accentuated the clear girlish outline of her profile. I felt the appeal of her youth and purity. It was like a cry in my heart, and the dreary house by the lake, and Pickering and the weeks within the stone walls of my prison were as though they had never been.

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"The friends who know me best never expect me to promise to be any where at a given time. I can't tell, perhaps I shall follow the blighted to Indians; but why should I, when I can't play being Olivia any more?"

"Why not? You have seen how dull I am, and that note of apology you wrote from the school really fooled me. But I have seen the real Olivia now. I don't want you to go so far—not where I can't follow—and this flight I shall hardly dare repeat."

Her lips closed—like a rose that had gone back to be a bud again—and she pondered a moment, slowly freeing and imprisoning the golden butterflies.

"You have risked a fortune, Mr. Glenarm, very, very foolishly—if you are found here. Why, Olivia must have recognized you! She had seen you often across the wall."

"But I don't care—I'm not staying at that run up there for money. My grandfather meant more to me than that."

"Yes; I believe that is so. He was a dear old gentleman; and he liked me because I thought his jokes adorable. My father and he had known each other. But there was—no expectation—no wish to profit by his friendship. My name in his will is a great embarrassment, a source of real annoyance. The newspapers printed dreadful pictures of me in connection with the will. I say to you, quite frankly, that I wouldn't accept a cent of Mr. Glenarm's money if it were offered me, and that is why—and her smile was a flash of spirit—"I want you to obey the terms of the will and earn your fortune."

She closed the fan sharply and lit her eyes to mine.

"But there isn't any fortune; it's all a myth, a joke."

"Mr. Pickering doesn't seem to think so. He had every reason for believing that Mr. Glenarm was a very rich man."

"But assuming that there's money buried there by the lake like a pirate's treasure, it isn't Pickering's if he finds it. There are laws to protect even the dead from robbery!" I emphasized hotly.

"How difficult you are! Suppose you should fall from a boat, or be shot accidentally—then I might have to take the fortune after all—and Mr. Pickering might think of an easier way of getting it than by—"

"Stealing it! Yes; I know what you mean; but you wouldn't—"

Half-past 12 struck on the stairway and I started to my feet.

"You wouldn't!" I repeated.

"I might, you know!"

"I must go—but not with that, not with any hint of that—please!"

"If you let me go—"

to spend your last days—well, overlook this one, I suppose." She pointed upwards to the sky, which was full of clouds but infinitely kinder than them."

The patient seemed fatigued. He rose to the light and smiled the gentle smile.

"Then—"

"Then, let me see—oh, I still never have another rabbit as young as this. Now go quickly—quickly."

"But you never told me when and where it was we met the first time."

"She stopped, but urged me away with her eyes.

"I always do it; it isn't proper for me to remember. Your memory is so poor. I wonder how it would seem for us to meet just now—and be introduced! Good night. You really came. You are a gentleman of your word, Captain Glenarm."

She gave me the tip of her fingers without looking at me.

A servant came in hurriedly.

"Miss Devereux, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor and Mr. Pickering are in the drawing-room."

"Yes, very well. I will come at once."

Then to me:

"They must not see you—there, that way" and she stood in the door, facing me, her hands lightly touching the frame as though to secure my way.

I turned for a last look and saw her waiting—her eyes bent gravely upon me, her arms still half raised, barring the door; then she turned swiftly away and passed through the hall.

Outside I found my hat and coat and walked my sleeping street. He drove the maid into the car, and I swung myself upon the north-bound train just as it was drawing out of the station.

(To Be Continued.)

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ITEMS OF INTEREST.

It is a majority of all cases the persons of Cossackism ruled. It is an open secret in that city, after one of the hardest fought battles of rebels every year in that city.

During the entire day thousands of women and children paraded the streets with banners and processions of reform.

They were to be seen in the streets.

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